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An Imperial Capital: Vijayanagara (c. Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries)

Vijayanagara, meaning "City of Victory," was a prominent imperial capital and empire in South India from the 14th to the 16th centuries. Founded on the banks of the Krishna River in the north to the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. The empire was ruled by four main dynasties: Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, and Aravidu.

The city of Vijayanagara was renowned for its unique architecture, including large gopurams (temple gateways), monolithic structures, and reflecting the empire's cultural diversity. Advanced water management systems, including reservoirs and canals, supported irrigation agriculture.

Trade was a significant aspect of Vijayanagara's economy, with horses imported from Arabia and Central Asia, controlled initially by Arab traders. The empire was famous for spices, textiles, and precious stones, contributing to its prosperity.

Vijayanagara's political history involved competition with neighboring sultanates and kingdoms, including the Deccan sultans (ashvapati) and the Vijayanagara Nayakas, who governed territories and collected revenue under the Amara-Nayaka system, a significant political innovation possibly influenced by the Vijayanagara rulers.

The empire declined after the Battle of Talikota in 1565 CE, where the combined forces of Bijapur, Ahmednagar, and Golconda defeated Vijayanagara. The city's ruins, Vijayanagara, survive through archaeological remains, inscriptions, and oral traditions.

Study Alert Points

- Remember the founders Harihara and Bukka, the chronology of dynasties (Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu) and key rulers like Krishnadevaraya.
- Understand the unique features of Vijayanagara architecture, such as large gopurams, monolithic structures, and iconic temples like Virupaksha and Hazara.
- Analyse travellers' accounts and archaeological findings to appreciate the grandeur of the city and its significance.
- Highlight specific socio-economic details like trade in horses, irrigation agriculture, and cultural patronage to avoid vague generalisations.

Exam-Oriented Questions

Q1: Who were the founders of the Vijayanagara Empire?

A1: The Vijayanagara Empire was founded by two brothers, Harihara and Bukka, in 1336 CE.

Q2: Name the four dynasties that ruled Vijayanagara.

A2: The four dynasties were Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, and Aravidu.

Q3: What were some unique architectural features of Vijayanagara?

A3: Unique features included large gopurams (temple gateways), monolithic structures, and iconic temples such as Virupaksha and Hazara.

Q4: What was the significance of the Amara-Nayaka system?

A4: The Amara-Nayaka system was a political and military arrangement where Nayakas governed territories, collected revenue, maintained

Rise and Fall of the Vijayanagara Empire

The Vijayanagara Empire was established in the 14th century and became a dominant power in South India. It expanded its territory under rulers of various kingdoms. The empire was known for its military strength, cultural patronage, and economic prosperity.

However, internal conflicts and external pressures led to its decline. The Battle of Talikota in 1565 CE was a turning point where the empire was abandoned, marking the end of the empire's dominance. Despite this, the cultural and architectural achievements of Vijayanagara continue to be studied and appreciated.

Exam-Oriented Questions

Q1: What was the extent of the Vijayanagara Empire at its peak?

A1: At its peak, the empire stretched from the Krishna River in the north to the southern tip of the Indian peninsula.

Q2: What led to the decline of the Vijayanagara Empire?

A2: The decline was due to internal conflicts, the defeat at the Battle of Talikota in 1565 CE by the combined Deccan sultanates, and subsequent invasions.

Q3: Who was Krishnadeva Raya and why is he significant?

A3: Krishnadeva Raya was a ruler of the Tuluva dynasty known for expanding and consolidating the empire, building temples, and promoting art and literature.

Vijayanagara—The Capital and Its Environs

The city of Vijayanagara was strategically located in a natural basin formed by the Tungabhadra River, surrounded by granite hills. It featured advanced water management systems such as the Hiriya Canal, supporting irrigation and urban needs.

The city was fortified with multiple lines of walls and gates, protecting not only the urban center but also agricultural lands. The Royal Centre Hall and the Mahanavami Dibba, a royal platform symbolizing power.

Markets and bazaars lined the main roads extending from temple gateways. The city had diverse religious shrines and temples supported by public works, indicating a well-planned urban settlement.

Exam-Oriented Questions

Q1: What natural features influenced the location of Vijayanagara?

A1: The city was located in a natural basin formed by the Tungabhadra River and surrounded by granite hills.

Q2: Describe the water management systems in Vijayanagara.

A2: The city had reservoirs like Kamalapuram Tank and canals such as the Hiriya Canal, which were used for irrigation and supplying water to the city.

Q3: What was the significance of the Mahanavami Dibba?

A3: The Mahanavami Dibba was a royal platform used for public ceremonies and symbolized the king's power.

The Sacred Centre

The Sacred Centre of Vijayanagara held religious and cultural significance. Local beliefs connected the northern rocky hills to the monkey king Hanuman, who is said to have performed penance here to marry Virupaksha, the incarnation of Shiva and the kingdom's guardian deity.

The Virupaksha temple, dating back to the 9th-10th centuries, was expanded during the Vijayanagara period. Krishnadeva Raya contributed to the temple's growth through various activities including music, dance, and drama.

The Vitthala Temple, dedicated to an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was another important shrine, famous for its chariot street lined with pillared pavilions in the city.

Exam-Oriented Questions

Q1: What is the significance of the Virupaksha temple in Vijayanagara?

A1: The Virupaksha temple was a major religious center, expanded during the Vijayanagara period, and served as a place for worship and cultural activities.

Q2: Who was Pampadevi and what was her connection to Vijayanagara?

A2: Pampadevi was the local Mother Goddess believed to have performed penance in the hills to marry Virupaksha, the guardian deity of the city.

Q3: Describe the chariot street of the Vitthala Temple.

A3: The chariot street was a stone-paved street extending from the temple gopuram, lined with pillared pavilions where traders set up shops.

Key Dates

Time Period / Year	Event / Change
c. 1200-1300	Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate
c. 1300-1400	Establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire; Bahmani Kingdom; Sultanates in Jaunpur, Kashmir, and Madura
c. 1400-1500	Establishment of the Gajapati kingdom of Orissa; Sultanates of Gujarat and Malwa; Emergence of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Mughal Empire
c. 1500-1600	Conquest of Goa by the Portuguese; Collapse of Bahmani kingdom; Emergence of Golconda Sultanate; Establishment of Mughal Empire

1800	Colin Mackenzie visits Vijayanagara
1815	Hampi discovered by Colin Mackenzie
1856	Alexander Green Law takes first detailed photographs of Hampi
1876	J.F. Fleet documents inscriptions on temple walls
1902	Conservation begins under John Marshall
1986	Hampi declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the significance of the Battle of Talikota in the history of Vijayanagara.

Solution: The Battle of Talikota in 1565 CE was a decisive conflict where the combined forces of the Deccan sultanates defeated Vijayanagara's dominance. The battle highlighted the failure of Vijayanagara's political strategy and the rise of regional powers.

Example 2: Describe the Amara-Nayaka system and its role in Vijayanagara's administration.

Solution: The Amara-Nayaka system was a military and administrative arrangement where Nayakas (military commanders) were granted territories. This system helped maintain control over the vast empire and ensured military readiness.

Practice Set

Easy

- Who founded the Vijayanagara Empire?
- Name two important temples in Vijayanagara.

Moderate

- Explain the importance of trade in the Vijayanagara Empire.
- What were the main features of Vijayanagara's architecture?

Challenging

- Discuss the causes and consequences of the Battle of Talikota.
- Analyze the role of the Amara-Nayaka system in the political stability of Vijayanagara.

Answer Key

Easy:

1. Harihara and Bukka
2. Virupaksha and Hazara Rama temples

Moderate:

1. Trade in horses, spices, textiles, and precious stones contributed to the empire's prosperity and military strength.
2. Large gopurams, monolithic structures, fusion of Indian and Islamic styles, and iconic temples.

Challenging:

1. The Battle of Talikota was caused by Vijayanagara's political miscalculations and alliances among Deccan sultanates; it resulted in the
2. The Amara-Nayaka system decentralized military and administrative power, enabling effective control over territories but also leading

Quick Reference

- **Founders:** Harihara and Bukka
- **Dynasties:** Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu
- **Famous Ruler:** Krishnadeva Raya
- **Key Battle:** Battle of Talikota (1565 CE)
- **Important Temples:** Virupaksha, Hazara Rama, Vitthala
- **Political System:** Amara-Nayaka system
- **Trade:** Horses, spices, textiles, precious stones
- **Water Management:** Kamalapuram Tank, Hiriya Canal
- **Architectural Features:** Gopurams, monolithic structures, fusion of styles

Glossary

Gopuram

Main entrance tower of a South Indian temple, often elaborately decorated.

Amara-Nayaka System

Military and administrative system where Nayakas governed territories under the king's authority.

Nayaka

Military commander and territorial governor in Vijayanagara Empire.

Virupaksha

Incarnation of Shiva and guardian deity of Vijayanagara; also the name of a major temple.

Mandapa

Pavilion or pillared hall within a temple complex used for various purposes.

Battle of Talikota

Decisive battle in 1565 CE leading to the defeat and decline of Vijayanagara Empire.

Krishnadeva Raya

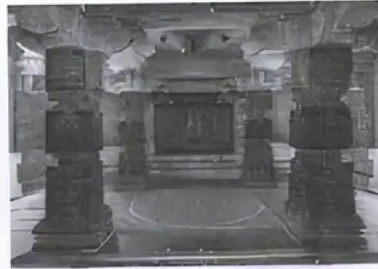
Most famous ruler of the Tuluva dynasty known for expansion and cultural patronage.

The Royal Centre housed palaces, administrative buildings, and grand pavilions.

Key structures included the Lotus Mahal and the Hazara Rama Temple, adorned with intricate carvings.

This area demonstrated the empire's wealth and architectural expertise, blending Indo-Islamic influences.

Waterworks like step-wells and aqueducts highlight advanced urban planning and resource management.



The Royal Centre

An Imperial Capital: Vijayanagara (c. Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century)

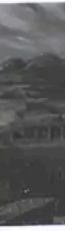
The city was divided into distinct zones: the Royal Centre, Sacred Centre, and residential areas.

The landscape featured massive fortifications, canals, and irrigation systems to support agriculture and trade.

Example: The Mahanavami Dibba, a raised platform, was used for royal ceremonies and symbolized imperial power.



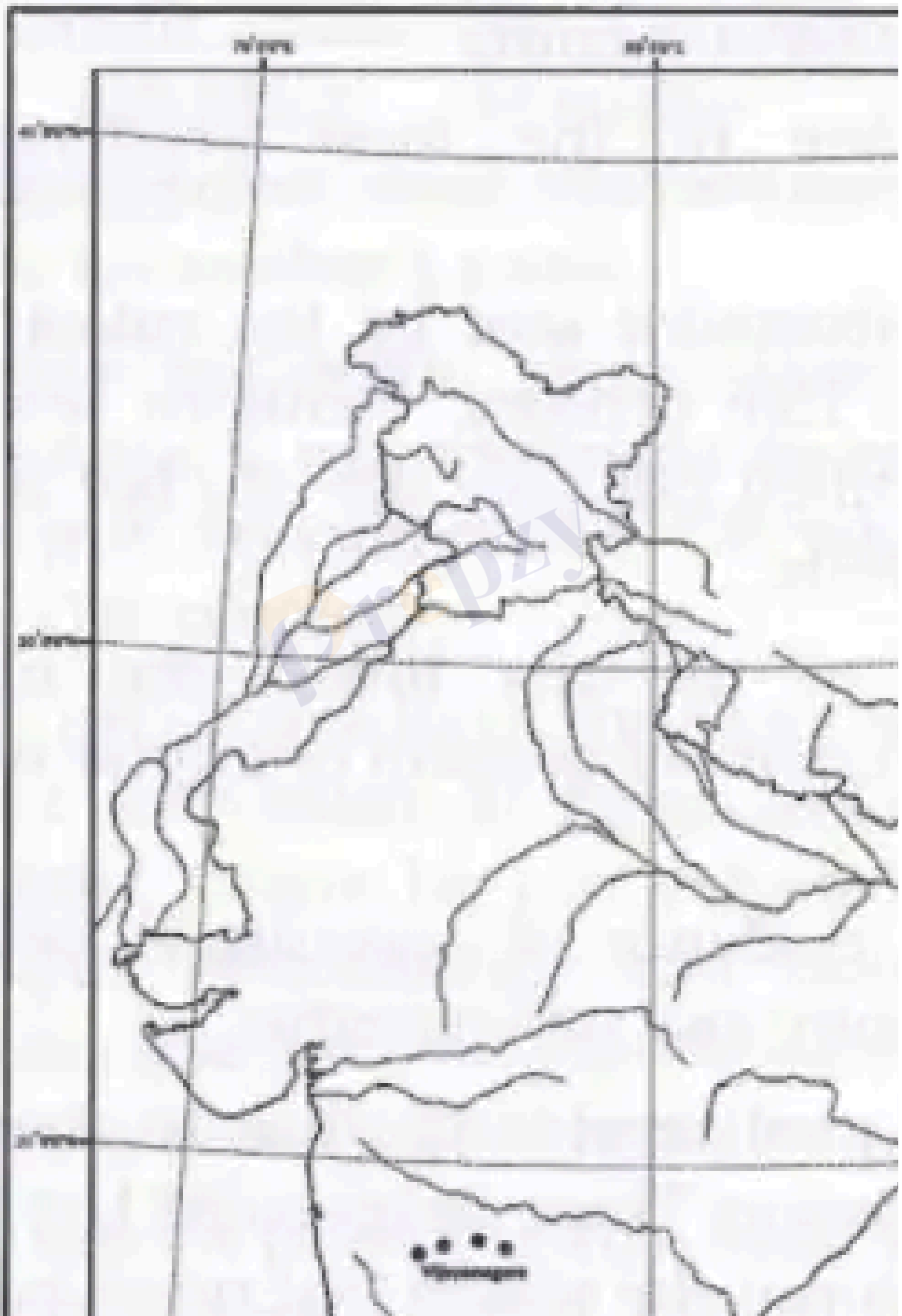
The Capital and its Environs

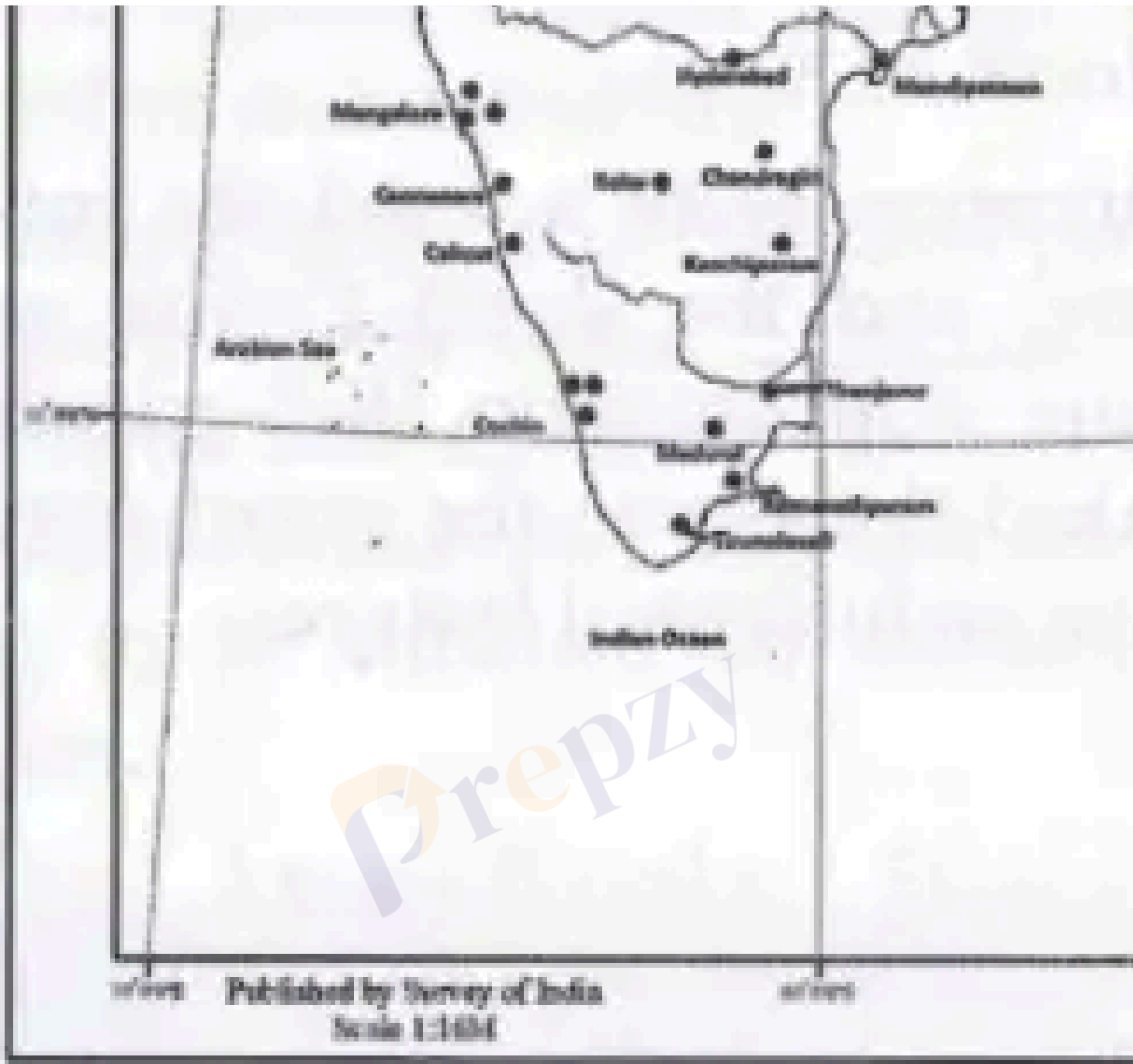


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